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Declaration of Student Rights at the University of Ottawa

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Preamble

The proposed text of the Declaration of Student Rights is intended to serve as the outcome of a constructive dialogue between the Office of the Vice-President, Governance, and the University of Ottawa student associations regarding the kind of environment that we seek to encourage on campus and throughout the institution – an atmosphere of freedom, mutual respect, and fairness that reflects the University community's values.

The Declaration of Student Rights is one of many initiatives undertaken by the University of Ottawa with the aim of providing the entire university community with a fair and respectful learning and working environment. The hiring of an Ombudsperson, the revision of the Policy on Sexual Harassment to include all forms of discrimination and harassment, as well as the establishment of an accessibility program are all initiatives designed to reflect the values and priorities that the University of Ottawa has established for the well-being of its community.

Most of the measures in the Declaration of Student Rights have been drawn from similar texts adopted by other Canadian universities. Examples may be found listed on the [Elsewhere page](#).

Students are, of course, integral members of the University community. Accordingly, and as stated in the Declaration, they are subject to the **responsibilities** contained in regulations, policies and directives of the University of Ottawa, and pursuant to various federal and provincial laws. Some of the responsibilities that students are subject to under the terms of the University's regulations and policies can be found on the [Responsibilities page](#), including those operating within the scope of various academic regulations.

We urge all members of the University community to provide their views and opinions on the proposed Declaration.

The key points in your suggestions and comments will be synthesized and published on this site and will be presented to the various decision-making authorities.

The University community's participation in this consultation is essential. We encourage everyone to make their voices heard.

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General Principles

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Whereas the University of Ottawa is an institution of higher education that aspires to academic excellence and provides a rich and stimulating environment for the entire student community, and believes in the importance of maintaining an atmosphere on campus that nurtures the working and learning activities of all of its students;

Whereas the University and its students share the task of maintaining a climate of freedom, mutual respect and fairness, and are responsible for ensuring that all students at the University of Ottawa are aware of their rights;

Whereas students' obligations are laid out in the University's regulations and policies, specifically in its various academic regulations;

Whereas educating students relies equally on respecting the rules of academic integrity and on raising awareness of the challenges relating to these issues;

Whereas the University is committed to recognizing students' rights as laid out in this Declaration;

The University endorses the rights listed below, which must be exercised so as to respect the values of the University community and for the welfare of its members as a whole.

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Scope

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1. This Declaration applies to all students registered for a course or program of study, with or without credit, offered by or through a faculty, school, centre, institute or other academic unit of the University, and to all postdoctoral research fellows and medical residents.

2. This Declaration does not apply to any students, postdoctoral research fellows or medical residents when they are acting in their roles as unionized employees. In the case of such employees, the provisions of the applicable collective agreement prevail.
3. This Declaration applies to the University's academic activities and to social activities organized by the University.

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Interpretation

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1. For the purposes of this document, “student” and “students” include all undergraduate and graduate students as well as postdoctoral fellows registered in the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.
2. The rights and freedoms set out in this Declaration must be exercised in accordance with applicable federal and provincial laws. This Declaration is not meant to supersede the provisions of any collective agreement to which the University is a signatory or any applicable university policy. If there is a conflict between a collective agreement and this Declaration, the provisions of the collective agreement prevail. It is understood that the University's policies shall be interpreted in light of the provisions of this Declaration. This Declaration has no retroactive effect.

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Rights

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1. **Fundamental rights**
Students have the right to exercise the following fundamental freedoms and to the recognition of these freedoms: freedom of religion, of opinion, and of expression, and freedom of peaceful assembly and association. Students' rights and freedoms will be applied so as to respect democratic values and the welfare of the University community as a whole, and in accordance with applicable laws.
2. **Absence of discrimination**
All students have the right to full and equal recognition of their rights and freedoms and to fully exercise such rights and freedoms; to freedom from discrimination and harassment; and to a healthy, safe and peaceful atmosphere to

pursue their academic activities in accordance with the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.

3. Right to privacy

All students have the right to privacy, to protection of their personal information and to access to information and these rights are subject to the University of Ottawa's *Policy 14a* on student records, the University's *Policy 90* on access to information and protection of privacy and any applicable laws. It is understood that a reasonable request for information in order to determine eligibility for a benefit or academic accommodation does not violate the right to privacy.

4. Academic rights

Students' academic rights include the right to:

- a. quality educational programs that reflect the advancement of knowledge in each discipline or area of studies and that enable students to develop critical thinking and other necessary skills;
 - b. a research environment that is ethical, and characterised by the pursuit of excellence and academic freedom;
 - c. be recognized as holding the copyright on and moral rights to their work and to be informed of these rights before an agreement is reached with respect to the student's participation in research projects;
 - d. the training activities, student academic success services, library resources, equipment and classrooms necessary for student learning and success, subject to the University's financial and administrative resources;
 - e. financial assistance and support programs and learning support services, subject to eligibility criteria and depending on the reasonable availability of resources;
 - f. receive, at the beginning of the session in each course, a written course outline that contains the Senate-approved course description, the learning objectives, the evaluation methods and criteria, as well as referring to the University's regulation on plagiarism and the appeal process available to challenge an evaluation;
 - g. receive, within a reasonable time period or by an agreed-upon date, a fair and impartial evaluation of their examinations and coursework in accordance with the evaluation criteria as set in the course outline or in accordance with the University's academic regulations;
 - h. an appeal process for academic matters, in accordance with the University and faculties policies;
 - i. be informed of student services offered by the University and the means to access these services;
 - j. make a complaint without fear of reprisals or threats.
5. Students affected by a decision-making process have the right to be:
- a. informed of the details of any measures undertaken with regard to them so that they can make meaningful representations;
 - b. heard in order to express their point of view, without fear of reprisals or threats;
 - c. accompanied by a person of their choice and to be informed in advance of this right;

- d. provided with an impartial decision with reasons based on objective criteria as set in the course outline and in accordance with the academic regulations of the University of Ottawa, within a reasonable time frame, taking into account the nature of the matter and circumstances surrounding it.
- 6. Graduate students also have the right to:
 - a. select their supervisor from among available and willing members of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies affiliated with their program;
 - b. a quality supervision that promotes their learning;
 - c. be consulted on the make-up of their thesis committee and not to be judged by an examiner who in their opinion is unable to evaluate them impartially;
 - d. defend their thesis within a reasonable time.

7. Language rights

Students' language rights include the right to:

- a. express themselves and receive quality services in the official language of their choice and to realize their potential in an atmosphere that respects both official languages;
 - b. receive communications intended for the entire University community in the official language of their choice;
 - c. receive communications and academic material from their Faculty or department in the official language of their choice, to the extent that their program is offered in both official languages;
 - d. express themselves and be understood in the official language of their choice, except where courses are offered in a prescribed language;
 - e. be informed of the language requirements for courses and programs;
 - f. take courses with appropriate teaching materials in the official language of the course if reasonably available;
 - g. be supported in updating their language training or in language immersion, depending on the reasonable availability of resources;
 - h. study in the official language of their choice where a program is offered in both official languages and in accordance with the established terms of the program;
 - i. express themselves in the official language of their choice at departmental assemblies, Faculty committee meetings, Senate meetings and Board of Governors meetings;
 - j. freely speak a language other than English or French, where circumstances permit.
- 8. The publication of minutes or other documents in the language of discussion is deemed not to contravene this section.

9. The right to participate in collegial governance

The University recognizes that the collegial process and the participation of men and women are fundamental elements of university life and of governance. Students have the right to governance that is collegial and representative and to representation on departmental assemblies, Faculty committees, the Senate and its

- committees and the Board of Governors and its executive, particularly when policies and regulations concerning students, changes to the University's strategic plan and program evaluations are being addressed. Students also have the right to respect towards their applicable representative and democratically elected governance bodies such as the Student Federation of the University of Ottawa (SFUO) for undergraduate students and such as the Graduate Student Association of the University of Ottawa (GSAÉD) for graduate students.
10. Except where student elections are provided for by University bylaws and regulations, student associations have the right to nominate candidates for positions reserved for students within University administrative structures. Where candidates meet previously established criteria, the University will not unreasonably refuse to appoint the nominated candidate.

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Remedies

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1. Where there is an alleged violation of a right provided for in this Declaration, a student must use the remedies contained in the University's academic and administrative policies. In the absence of such a remedy, and where warranted, the student must first attempt to communicate with the person concerned in an attempt to resolve the problem. If circumstances prevent the student from dealing directly with this individual or if the violation continues, the student can submit a written complaint to the Appropriate Authority within a reasonable time frame, depending on the nature of and circumstances surrounding the complaint.
2. In the case of an alleged violation of a right provided for in this Declaration, the Appropriate Authority must take measures to stop the violation and to prevent future violations and if appropriate, must take corrective action.
3. "Appropriate Authority" means, depending on the circumstances:
 - a. the Dean responsible for the Faculty, where the alleged violation involves a professor, member of the support staff, a researcher or a clinical instructor attached to the Dean's Faculty;
 - b. The University Librarian, where the alleged violation involves a library employee;
 - c. the appropriate Vice-President, where the alleged violation involves a member of the support staff from a unit under that Vice-President's responsibility, including deans and the University Librarian;
 - d. the President, where the alleged violation involves a Vice-President;
 - e. the Chair of the Board of Governors, where the alleged violation is caused by an act of the President; or
 - f. any of the above persons' duly authorized representatives.

4. Where the Appropriate Authority has a conflict of interest, the Vice-President, Governance, will assign the complaint to an impartial party.
5. The person receiving the complaint must respond to the complaint within 10 working days of receiving the complaint.
6. If a resolution is not reached at this first stage, the matter will be heard by a University standing committee composed of the following members:
 - a. one regular full-time professor appointed by the Executive Committee of the Senate;
 - b. one full-time student selected by the applicable representative and democratically elected governance bodies of the graduate students, such as the GSAÉD;
 - c. one full-time student selected by the applicable representative and democratically elected governance bodies of the undergraduate students, such as SFUO;
 - d. one University support staff member appointed by the Executive Committee of the Board of Governors; and
 - e. one University alumnus appointed by the Executive Committee of the Senate, who will act as Committee Chair.
7. Quorum for a Committee meeting is three members and must include the Chair, a professor or member of the support staff and one student. Committee decisions are made by majority vote, with the Committee Chair voting only in the case of a tie.
8. The Committee's mandate includes developing, as required, its own procedures to ensure effective handling of complaints.
9. The Committee will hear the interested parties and, as necessary, any other individuals. The Committee will study the matter and:
 - a. determine no further action will be taken in the case of a complaint deemed frivolous, vexatious, vindictive or an abuse of process;
 - b. mediate the matter if the Committee believes it can help the parties reach a resolution; or
 - c. make recommendations to the appropriate Vice-President or to the President, who will in turn render a final decision.
10. The Office of the Vice-President, Governance, is responsible for keeping records related to a complaint filed under the provisions of this Declaration.
11. A student may contact the Ombudsman after pursuing the remedies as laid out in the Declaration.
12. This Declaration may be amended by a Senate motion following a recommendation from the Declaration Evaluation Committee, composed of the following members:
 - a. the Vice-President, Governance;
 - b. a dean or a vice-dean;
 - c. one regular professor;
 - d. two full-time graduate students and/or members of the applicable representative and democratically elected governance bodies of the graduate students, such as the GSAÉD;

- e. two full-time undergraduate students and/or members of the applicable representative and democratically elected governance bodies of the undergraduate students, such as the SFUO;
- f. the University standing Committee Chair, namely one University alumnus.

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Student Responsibilities

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Some of the responsibilities that students are subject to under the terms of the University's regulations and policies can be found below, including those operating within the scope of various academic regulations.

- [Regulations and Policies for Undergraduate Studies](#)
- [Academic Integrity](#)
- [Email Policy](#)
- [User Code of Conduct for Computing Resources](#)
- [Tuition Fees](#)
- [Housing and Conventions Service Code of Conduct](#)
- [Student Academic Success Service Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Process](#)
- [Policy on sexual harassment](#)
- [Student record policy](#)
- [Use of university of Ottawa facilities and services](#)
- [Noise, food, and drink policy in the uOttawa Library](#)
- [Professionalism at the Faculty of Medicine](#)
- [Postdoctoral Fellows-Responsibilities, Dispute Resolution Policy, and Procedure](#)
- [Security Policy](#)

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Elsewhere

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You will find examples of similar texts adopted by other Canadian universities in the following links:

- [University of Toronto](#)
- [Queen's University](#)

- [University of Western Ontario](#)
- [York University](#)
- [Brock University](#)
- [Windsor University](#)
- [McMaster University](#)
- [Carleton University](#)
- [McGill University](#)
- [Dalhousie University](#)

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FAQ

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15. [Who sits on the University standing committee?](#)
16. [Who makes the final decision on a complaint?](#)
17. [Is there a right to appeal?](#)

1. **What is the purpose of the Declaration of Student Rights?** The Declaration is intended to reaffirm the University of Ottawa's commitment to recognize basic student rights at the University.
2. **Does the Declaration of Student Rights apply to all students?** The Declaration of Student Rights applies to all students, postdoctoral fellows and medical residents at the University while engaged in academic or social activities

organized by the University. It does not apply to students in the context of their employment at the University.

3. **How does the Declaration of Student Rights fit in with other University policies or with other laws?** The Declaration of Student Rights is not meant to supersede University policies and is exercised in accordance with all applicable federal and provincial laws. However, the University's policies are interpreted in light of the provisions of the Declaration of Student Rights. In the case of a conflict of interpretation between the provisions of the Declaration and of a collective agreement, the collective agreement provisions prevail.
4. **Which rights does the Declaration of Student Rights cover?** The rights granted under the Declaration include fundamental rights, academic rights, language rights and right to participate in collegial university governance.
5. **What are fundamental rights?** These rights include, for example, the right to freedom of religion, freedom of opinion, expression and of peaceful assembly and association.
6. **What are academic rights?** The Declaration of Student Rights covers certain academic rights, such as the right to quality educational programs, to a research environment that is ethical and characterised by the pursuit of academic freedom, to student support services for student learning and success, and to fair and impartial academic evaluations. Academic rights also include a student's right to be informed of the details of any measures to be taken in the course of a decision-making process involving the student, the right to be heard without fear of reprisal or threat, the right to be accompanied by a person of their choice and to be given an impartial decision with reasons and within a reasonable time frame.
7. **What is meant by language rights?** Language rights are rights relating to English and French as official languages. The Declaration of Student Rights provides for a number of language rights such as students' right to express themselves in, and to receive services and communications in, the official language of their choice.
8. **What about privacy rights?** Privacy rights and rights associated with access to information are covered in other University policies such as the *Policy on Student Records*, the *Policy on Access to Information and Protection of Privacy* and applicable laws.
9. **Does the Declaration of Student Rights cover the right to freedom from harassment and discrimination?** All students have the right to full and equal recognition of their rights and freedoms and to fully exercise such rights and freedoms; to freedom from discrimination and harassment; and to a healthy, safe and peaceful atmosphere to pursue their academic activities in accordance with the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. The University's Harassment and Discrimination Policy is currently under review.
10. **What is the process if a student wishes to complain about an alleged violation of a right granted under the Declaration of Student Rights?** Depending on the alleged violation of a right, there may already be a complaint process or remedy existing under another University policy. If there is no such process or remedy, the student must try to communicate with the person concerned in an attempt to resolve the problem. If circumstances are such that the student cannot attempt a

- resolution with the person involved, then the student can follow the complaint process under the Declaration of Student Rights.
11. **What is the process under the Declaration of Student Rights if a student wishes to make a complaint?** Complaints are handled by an Appropriate Authority at the University. The designation of the Appropriate Authority will depend on the circumstances surrounding the complaint. The Appropriate Authority is the Dean where the alleged violation involves a professor, researcher or clinical instructor or a University employee in a Faculty. If the alleged violation involves a University employee in an administrative unit or office outside of the Faculty, then the Appropriate Authority is the Vice-President responsible for that administrative unit or office.
 12. **What if the Appropriate Authority as defined in the Declaration of Student Rights is in conflict or is involved in the alleged violation?** In such a situation, the Vice-President Governance may assign an impartial person to handle the complaint.
 13. **How long does the complaint process take?** The Appropriate Authority must respond to the complaint with 10 working days of receiving it. The Appropriate Authority will attempt to resolve the matter within a reasonable time frame. The nature of the complaint and the circumstances will affect the length of time.
 14. **What happens if the complaint is not resolved by the Appropriate Authority?** A University standing committee will study the matter, hear the interested parties and any other individuals associated with the complaint, if necessary and will either determine that the complaint requires no further action because it is frivolous; or it will try to mediate; or it may make recommendations to the Vice-President or President, as the case may be, who will in turn make a final decision on the matter.
 15. **Who sits on the University standing committee?** The University standing committee is composed of five members: one professor, one full-time student selected by the applicable representative and democratically elected governance bodies of the graduate students, such as the GSAÉD, one full-time student selected by the applicable representative and democratically elected governance bodies of the undergraduate students, such as SFUO, one University employee and one University alumnus.
 16. **Who makes the final decision on a complaint?** The University standing committee may make recommendations on the matter; however, it is the Vice-President or President who makes the final decision.
 17. **Is there a right to appeal?** There is no right to appeal to the final decision; however, if, after pursuing the remedies under the Declaration of Student Rights, the student is not satisfied with the handling of the complaint, the student may contact the University Ombudsman.